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**THE PORTUGUESE LABOUR MOVEMENT: REVITALIZATION
STRATEGIES**

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'The morality of work is the morality of slaves, and the modern world has no need of slavery.'

Bertrand Russell in Praise of Idleness 1932

ABSTRACT

This work analyses the activity and influence of the trade unions in Portugal and evaluates their recent attempt to revitalise by using a framework of five possible strategies. Emphasis is placed on the historical, political and economic context to assess the strength and presence of the trade unions across society. The findings point to a growth of influence particularly at the political and institutional level and to a loss of presence at workplace and firm level. The evidence is in favour of the maintenance of unions' strength in the Portuguese society.

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THE PORTUGUESE LABOUR MOVEMENT: REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIP	Associação Industrial Portuguesa - Portuguese Association of Industry
AEP	Associação Empresarial Portuguesa - Portuguese Business Association
CAP	Confederação da Agricultura Portuguesa -Portuguese Agriculture Confederation
CB	Collective Bargaining
CCP	Confederação do Comércio Português – Confederation of the Portuguese Commerce
CGTP (CGTP-IN)	Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses - Intersindical Nacional - General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers
CIP	Confederação da Indústria Portuguesa – Confederation of the Portuguese Industry
HRM	Human Resources Management
PCP	Partido Comunista Português - Portuguese Communist Party
PNE	Plano Nacional de Emprego - National Employment Plan
PS	Partido Socialista – Socialist Party
PSD	Partido Social Democrata - Social Democratic Party
TSD	Trabalhadores Social Democratas - Social Democratic Workers
UGT	União Geral de Trabalhadores - General Union of Workers
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe
WTO	World Trade Organization

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Webbs defined a trade union as being ‘a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment’ (1898:1). Their writings influenced Vladimir Iljitsch Uljanov – Lenin – leading him to argue that if trade unions were left to develop spontaneously, their selfish nature could only be resisted through the deliberate intervention of a revolutionary party. In fact, Lenin’s ideas led him to proclaim: ‘We shall work hard in the trade unions, we shall work in all fields to spread the revolutionary theory of Marxism among the proletariat and to build up a "stronghold" of class organisation. The rest will come of itself.’ (Lenin 1907). The history of the labour movement was not, however, what Lenin desired. In the last decades, the labour movement has declined in many developed countries transforming a potentially powerful social force into a weak weapon struggling for ammunitions. In some countries, however, scholars argue that this trend might be reversing.

The purpose of the present work is to analyse the trade unions’ situation in Portugal, namely their ongoing attempts of revitalization and modernisation, why the strategies employed were chosen above other possibilities, and establish a brief comparison with the situation in other countries. Emphasis will be placed on the historical, political and economic context that led to important transformations in the Portuguese trade unions since the beginning of the integration process into the European Union. Furthermore, the degree of workers’ participation not only at the workplace level but also in national politics and society will be analysed. It also seemed crucial to assess the activity and influence of the two leading confederations of trade unions - CGTP¹ and UGT².

In this dissertation it will be argued that the ‘corporatist’ strategy undertaken in the last decade had two consequences: firstly, it maintained the trade unions’ influence and, thus, their political power; secondly, the workers lost much of the unions’ protection, at least at the workplace level.

¹ Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses - Intersindical Nacional.

² União Geral de Trabalhadores.

2. INDICATORS AND STRATEGIES

‘With imagination, unions may transform themselves and build an emancipatory potential
for labour in the new millennium.’

in Hyman 2001

The current manifestations of the unregulated global economy can be seen not only in the growth of economic and social inequality but also in the decline of civil participation in the political and community life. In this universe, the trade unions are still a major actor within the civil society and, therefore, can help the building of new democratic values by promoting participation within and across local, national and global levels. To be able to do this, however, the labor movement needs to reverse its global declining trend of influence in society.

The trade unions display a multiplicity of organizational forms as well as ideological orientations. This pluralism reveals different and conflicting definitions of their nature, rival conceptions of their purpose and opposing models of strategy and tactics. According to Hyman (2001), the unions can be seen as a) economic agencies engaged in collective bargaining over employment conditions, b) confronting organizations engaged in a hostile class struggle, and/or c) components of the fabric of social order. Each identity is a reflection of the historical and national contexts in which the organization emerged. For example, their identity can be shaped by the interests they support, by the unions and their members’ conception of democracy, by the unions’ agenda, and also by the type of power resources which they cultivate and apply. (Hyman 2001).

The union density³ is one of the indicators of union strength. Other indicators include the mobilizing capability, the political influence, the bargaining power, the organizational stability and the existing legal protection. However, the union density is often the most available indicator and it is currently used to judge claims of representativeness, as well as to assess unions’ economic impact (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999: 135–6). Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the meaning of union density and its relationship to union power may vary across countries. (Blaschke 2000: 217). For example, on one hand, in Britain, in order to be recognized by the employer the unions need union density. In fact, according to Heery, *et*

³ Membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners.

al. (2001), the union density was 53 per cent when the employer recognised trade unions but only 4 per cent when there was no recognition (Cully, *et al.* 1999; Gallie 1996). On the other hand, in France, the unions have put less emphasis on recruiting a stable mass of members, which is one of the explanations for the country's low rate of unionization (Blaschke 2000: 217).

In their analysis of the American labour movement, Hurd, *et al.* (2001) supported the view that there was, to a certain extent, a revitalization of the unions. Their findings indicate that it was driven by two forces. First, from above, there was new leadership in some unions and the AFL-CIO⁴ was 'ready to offer resources and institutional support for local efforts to organize, build coalitions and expand the scope of grass-roots politics'. Second, from below, there was renewed interest in rank-and-file activism and participation. On one hand, the authors believed that strong unions are largely a top-down phenomenon, dependent primarily on centralized authority and institutions. On the other hand, Hurd, *et al.* took issue with those who argued that union revitalization was primarily dependent on rank-and-file mobilization. 'Both these perspectives are to a significant extent accurate, but not in their mutual exclusion, in their rejection of the other'. In fact, their findings point to the fact that the key forces driving successful revitalization were neither top-down nor bottom-up but both. Local union reform efforts, including organizing the unorganised, innovative collective bargaining campaigns, coalition building and grass roots political action, depended 'for their development and sustainability on *both* strong support from the national union *and* new rank-and-file leadership and mobilization'. They called these two forces *institutional support* and *network mobilization*, and indications were found of their overriding importance in all six of the union strategies on which their research was focused: organizing, political action, coalition-building, labour-management partnership, mergers and internal restructuring, and international solidarity. With great regularity, however, they have found that there was widespread tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches and that they were both necessary for sustained success in the contemporary revitalization of the American labour movement. (Hurd, *et al.* 2001: 2). In this context, the Portuguese case is interesting since its unions have been politically oriented to the top level for the last two decades and there is, apparently, no strong network mobilisation. Yet, unions have been able to survive and even maintain their power.

⁴ The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

In this work, the framework created recently by Turner (2000) will be used as it was specifically defined to analyse the labour movements in a global perspective. The universal character of this broad framework is not nationally dependent and, therefore, is more suitable for application to the Portuguese case. Turner selected six significant strategies for the unions' revitalization: 1) social partnership; 2) political action; 3) organizing; 4) coalition building; 5) internal restructuring and mergers and 6) international solidarity.

On considering them, one should simultaneously analyse how they might help, in principle, the unions to recover their influence in society:

1) The *social partnership* with employers or with the state could influence a number of the variables, which, as mentioned above, are known to affect union membership. For example, as the agreements symbolize unions' desire to co-operate with employers or the state, it could also help to reduce both employers and employees antagonism to unions. Besides, if agreements improve workers' terms and conditions of employment, they could increase perceptions of union instrumentality amongst non-union employees. In addition, at the macro-level, the partnership can be a powerful tool to influence society if, for instance, the trade union is ideologically oriented;

2) The *political action* could be also a powerful tool that unions have at their disposal to influence their partners. Depending on unions' nature and efficacy, the political power is a weapon that can be used to influence the outcomes of bargaining processes. For instance, by protesting against a specific subject the unions can gain advantage over their partners at the negotiation table. This 'political exchange' can be of crucial importance and constitutes an important power resource in democratic countries, namely in their relations with government;

3) The *organising the new labour force* is a relatively straightforward strategy since it aims to increase the volume of resources devoted to the recruitment and organization of new members, and in this manner enhance the labour market power of the unions;

4) The *coalition building* strategies could enhance the links with other similar and different organizations that intervene in society. This could have a number of different effects: a) It could help unions to acquire new allies and new power resources. For instance, by providing access to key individuals and networks within specific communities who could assist them with organising campaigns; b) It could also serve the purpose of broadening the range of

interests and agendas that unions seek to represent and, therefore, to expand unions' appeal to poorly represented segments of the labour force (Hyman 1997);

5) The *internal restructuring and mergers* could assist the unions' revitalization by achieving economies of scale and, therefore, reduce the cost of unions' services. Furthermore, in situations of competitive unionism, mergers could reduce inter-union conflicts and through this, increase the union bargaining power vis-à-vis the employer;

6) The *International solidarity* strategy could range from the organization of specific bargaining campaigns to anti-WTO demonstrations. It could also provide information about multinational corporations to the unions, which could be useful to organise, bargain and enhance solidarity among different national unions. Furthermore, the international links could also increase union political power through, for instance, the lobbying efforts in international union institutions at the European political level. (Heery, *et al.* 2001).

Despite the universal character of Turner's framework, one has to bear in mind that labour plays a very different role in different societies. As mentioned before, the trade unions in the twentieth-century have displayed heterogeneous organizational forms and different ideological orientations. Therefore, one could argue that the specific Portuguese historical conditions - e.g. dictatorship 1933-74, union's monopoly 1938-78, revolution 1974, competing and ideologically oriented unions 1979-01, among others - as well as the EU integration process played a major role in shaping which identities were embraced by the trade unions. For example, during the dictatorship period (1933-74) the union's activities were strongly constrained by the absence of free-unionism and the existence of censorship in the unions' electoral process. Furthermore, the international isolation of the regime determined, to a large extent, the weakening of external pressure in the unions' responses to hard times.

It is also important to stress the preliminary nature of this analysis. In fact, the Portuguese labour literature is scarce and there are not many relevant academic studies in this area neither any systematic compilation of data to support a conclusive study. One of the main reasons for this insufficiency of information is that the study of industrial relations is relatively recent in Portugal - until the late 1980s only a few independent studies on the labour movement could be found. In fact, the first significant, independent, academic and in-depth studies on the trade unions have only been published over the last years, mainly supported by European institutions. Before this, the only existing research consisted in case studies based on large

companies, ignoring the largest proportion of the Portuguese labour force - the small and medium companies. The incomplete nature of these studies is evident if one takes into account that 97% of the Portuguese companies had less than 50 workers and employed 50% of the workforce, in 1994 (Barreto and Naumann 1998).

In order to evaluate the successes and failures of the labour movement strategies, interviews were conducted with CGTP and employers association (CIP) leaders. Besides, the Turner's framework was applied to the Portuguese case in order to analyse the impact of the strategies the unions decided to use to revitalise. However, due to the above-mentioned particularities of the Portuguese case and to the little information available, the focus will be on five of the Turner's strategies.

3. STRATEGIES OF REVITALIZATION

3.1.SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

A major innovation of the 1980s had important consequences to the labour movement in Portugal - the introduction of a tripartite social concertation forum. This peak-level institution, baptized Social Dialogue⁵, is a body in which all social partners (CGTP⁶, UGT, CIP, CCP and CAP) excluding independents⁷ seat with the government in order to engage in negotiations. These meetings are held at the Standing Commission for Social Concertation (*Comissão de Concertação Social*) which is a committee of the Economic and Social Council (*Conselho Económico e Social*).

a) Social Dialogue – A new paradigm for the labour movement?

Since its foundation in 1984, the Social Dialogue has shaped the behaviour of the actors. In particular because the unions had to adapt not only to a more complex system of bargaining but also to an increasing number of issues ranging from fiscal reforms to specific Human Resources Management policies (EIROnline October 98).

A good example of the Social Dialogue's outcomes is the implementation of the National Employment Plan (PNE), in 1998. Encompassed in this plan were issues connected to fiscal policy, health and security issues and public administration. More specifically, the plan included policies on professional training, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as recruitment rules, internships, evaluation periods for new workers and the implementation of information and consultation procedures. According to Pires de Lima and Rego (2001), the PNE resulted in a positive development of the economy. After 6 months of execution more than half of the policies had been implemented, confirming the success of the plan.

⁵ The term Social Dialogue will be used to mean Social Partnership as defined by Ferner and Hyman (1998: xv).

⁶ CGTP objected strongly to this governmental initiative, accusing it as being a 'corporatist' intrigue to undermine the 'working class's struggle against capitalist exploitation'. However, after the overwhelming victory of the liberal-conservative party (PSD) in the 1987 election, CGTP agreed to participate in the forum, fearing that its voice would otherwise not be heard. In addition, one should notice that CGTP only occupied its seat three years after the creation of the Social Dialogue (first settled in 1984). At the time, CGTP recognised that its presence was required since its presence over the issues at discussion 'will fasten the working conquests'.

⁷ In fact, in the end of the 1980s, the UGT and CGTP opposition blocked the Convention of Independent Unions' attempt to win representation on the Social Dialogue (Barreto and Naumann 1998). The absence of available, complete and independent studies as well as unions' political influence forced the government to accept 'some information of quantitative and qualitative nature' as a criteria to recognise the two labour confederations and to leave the independent unions aside of the Social Dialogue. (Pires de Lima and Rego 2001).

The PNE for the year 2000 was even more ambitious than the former ones. One of the objectives was to increase the integration of youngsters in the working life by raising their skill levels. Furthermore, it aimed both at fighting illegal work through more effective inspection policies, and at implementing green-friendly procedures to promote start-ups.

In the beginning of the year 2000 the social partners agreed with the proposal of the Portuguese government to define a new working methodology for the Social Dialogue. The goal was to prevent the frequent blockages in the negotiation process, due to the refusal by one of the partners to sign the deals. For instance, in the 1990s CGTP did not sign three important agreements: the Social and Economic Agreement (1990), the Short-Term Social Concertation Pact (1996) and the 1996-9 Strategic Concertation Pact. The first agreement had limited impact mainly due to conflicting positions within the unions (Campos Lima, *et al.* 1999). The Compulsory Arbitrage issue was postponed, and both the issues of Flexible Working Hours and Reduction of Working Hours failed to achieve their intended objectives. Some analysts argue, furthermore, that the refusal of CGTP to sign was the main cause of the low impact of the two latter accords (Campos Lima, *et al.* 1999: 60; Pires de Lima and Rego 2001). According to Pires de Lima and Rego, the 1996-9 Strategic Concertation Pact was polemic. The lack of governmental support as well as the employers association's opposition caused the 40 Hours Per Week issue to be almost abandoned. It was the near failure of this pact, on which the government blamed CGTP that motivated the creation of the mentioned new methodology for the Social Dialogue.

To facilitate agreements, the methodology put aside wage bargaining from this negotiation table and focused more on middle-term agreements and on a less controversial range of issues. This eased the tension between the government and CGTP since they had both been accusing each other of being responsible for the failed agreements. In fact, both CGTP and UGT had been protesting against the government: street demonstrations, public sector and transport strikes, congress speeches and the release of a common document⁸ specifying the unions objectives were some of the actions undertaken.

According to Pires de Lima and Rego, in the last fifteen years the Social Dialogue has improved the relationship between capital, labour and government. Furthermore, the new methodology seems to be working well, considering the two last broad agreements signed by

⁸ This document was published for the last Portuguese presidency of the European Union.

both unions. Among other advantages of the Social Dialogue one can highlight: a) the influence on the Collective Bargaining process, b) the wage moderation, c) the commitment to achieve the EURO convergence criteria (e.g. monetary stability and cuts in the interest rates), d) the flexibilization, to a certain extent, of labour law and labour market, e) the reduction of working hours, and f) the definition of policies concerning economy, work, employment, professional training and social security.

The Social Dialogue also improved the industrial conflict rates. In fact, nowadays Portugal has the fourth lowest strike rate out of 18 industrialised countries, quite distant from the other Southern European countries: Greece, Spain and Italy. This low incidence of industrial conflict contributed to improve and stabilise the democratisation process, which was characterized by high political conflict. (Pires de Lima and Rego 2001). Therefore, the Social Dialogue has been considered by analysts as a positive feature of contemporary Portugal in the social, economic and political spheres.

To conclude, one can argue that through the Social Dialogue the unions got involved in fertile negotiations in a broad range of issues. In fact, they dealt with employment quantity and quality, working conditions and social security at the national level and also with issues that had EU impact. However, one should not assume that the Social Dialogue was entirely pacific. For example, the inflexibility of the government in the 2000 negotiations for the public sector created a lot of social tension. Nonetheless, the outcome of the Social Dialogue committed the partners in terms of economic growth and competitiveness, social justice and benefits. Through the Social Dialogue the unions have engaged in a powerful tool to revitalise their influence.

b) Collective Bargaining

The Collective Bargaining (CB) process is highly complex in Portugal. Firstly, because it largely depends on employers willingness to negotiate with the unions. As there is no legal obligation for the employers to recognise a union⁹, they can simply refuse to negotiate with it. Secondly, the overlapping in collective agreements is common, which means that frequently within the same enterprise two or more agreements can be applicable, according to the union membership(s) of the workers. This situation can become even more complex if the enterprise

⁹ Although constitutionally all unions are considered have the same rights.

is involved in more than one economic activity and, therefore, belongs to more than one employers' association across the various subsectors.

In 1993, 90% of the Portuguese legal workers were nominally covered by some kind of 'instrument for work regulation' (Barreto and Naumann 1998). In Portugal, the CB process is, to a certain extent, very centralised at the sectoral level¹⁰. For instance, in 1996, 91% of the collective agreements were negotiated at sectoral level (EIROnline November 97)¹¹. Collective bargaining in Portugal, however, is still widely perceived to be overly formal, subject to incoherent legal regulation, poor in content and deficient in innovation (EIROnline December 00).

According to the main employers confederation (CIP), in Portugal both unions but especially the CGTP (the 'Communist Union' to use the CIP leader's expression) have been consistently against the introduction of new themes in CB agreements. On the contrary, there is an increasing interest on the part of capital to develop new forms of both workplace and human resource management in organizations. This has led to different positions from the two main unions. The UGT expressed some strategic interest in reaching agreements that deal with Human Resources Management (HRM) practices and management policies. By contrast, the class oriented CGTP stated that HRM was a new method to better exploit the workforce. Nevertheless, some CGTP's unions have taken a few significant enhancing propositions during the CB particularly in some sectors and companies (see for an interesting discussion Campos Lima, *et al.* 1999).

According to some analysts, the CB process has been shaped by features discussed at the Social Dialogue. Therefore, one should draw a light on the effects of the above-mentioned outcome of the Social Dialogue – the PNE - on the CB process. According to Pires de Lima and Rego, after one year, the PNE influenced 23% of the collective agreements signed. In fact, the agreements involved issues such as professional training under the normal working period as well as internships, recruitment rules, a reduction of working time to 40 hours, and the intention to increase productivity through the reshaping of 'professional' rankings or

¹⁰ Although one can observe decentralising tendencies in terms of negotiations in some countries (e.g. Britain, USA and, in a 'organised' way, in Germany and the Netherlands), in other countries the trend seems to be the opposite. In fact, in countries such as France and Spain the tendency is, in some respects, to centralise co-ordination at sectoral and peak levels (Ferner and Hyman 1998).

¹¹ According to EIROnline (November 97) the company-level agreements are found only in large or medium-sized enterprises, many of which were formerly public enterprises or are companies which do not belong to any employers' associations.

qualifications inside companies. However, the authors reported that the majority of the collective agreements only established wage settlements. In fact, they raised the possibility that there might be an important difference between what is agreed and what happens in reality.

Consequently, one can reasonably argue that, to a certain extent, the CB process mainly supplemented the old legal framework instead of substantially expand the range of issues at stake. Thus, despite being a political weapon as well as a ‘revitalization’ theme in the CGTP rhetoric, the sectoral CB has not always been consistently developed. For instance, according to Barreto and Naumann (1998), the role of CB in regulating the employment relationship has declined.

To conclude, it can be postulated that CB has not been the major instrument on the revitalization of the Portuguese labour movement mainly due to its relative stagnation. One can argue, for the moment, that the Social Dialogue has contributed more to the strength and influence of the trade unions in society than has CB. In fact, if one compares unions’ part in national policies during the first half of the 1980s and the protagonism they possess at high levels today one can conclude that they are presently playing an important role.

3.2.POLITICAL ACTION

The centrality of the unions’ political action can also be considered as a strategy of important consequences to the revitalization of the labour movement. The importance of political action in the Portuguese trade unions is mainly a consequence of: a) the importance of statutory regulation that resulted from an historical minimum role of societal self-regulation methods (e.g. CB), b) the weakness of unions and c) employers’ historical reliance on the government (Barreto and Naumann 1998). Besides, the political divisions born in the revolutionary period had also direct consequences not only on the fragile traditions of union pluralism but also in reinforcing their political course of action. Furthermore, and specially in the years after the revolution, the growing state preponderance in the economy (e.g. nationalisations) and its crisis contributed to increase the dependence on political action.

The two main confederations have pursued radically different tactics in terms of political action. On one hand, CGTP – that represents the large majority of the unionised labour – based its activity on a widespread web of militant activists as well as on the ‘mass mobilization’ capacity. On the other hand, UGT – that has its power resources concentrated in

the political arena through its strong influence in PS and PSD – relies more on its political influence over the political spectrum than in rank-and-file mobilization. (Barreto and Naumann 1998: 408).

In this context, political action has been one of the major components of the unions' efforts to maintain and revitalise their power. These efforts can be explained by a) the existence of common agendas with political institutions and b) the labour market conditions of a small country in the European periphery and c) the emphasis of their mobilization capacity.

Along with topics such as social security or illegal immigration, racism and child work, the unemployment issue has been a relevant example of unions' common agendas with political parties. Thus, one will first draw a light on an example of a systematically repeated common concern of the Portuguese unions - the unemployment problem.

a) Unemployment

Since the beginning of the European integration, the unemployment rate in Portugal had been on average 6% in 1988-98 and 4% in 2000 (OECD 2001). However, the unemployment composition has been changing from mainly youngsters to middle age long-term unskilled and female unemployment. Besides, according to commentators, although presently the unemployment rate is low and the employment rate is high for European standards, the low skilled workers represent a structural risk for the economy. Furthermore, the low productivity and the low wages has been, at least in the European integration process, a major threat to the Portuguese economy. In addition, one should also consider the unprotected forms of labour (part-time and temporary), the informal recruitment process and finally the illegal immigration in the range of issues that might endanger the economy.

The systematic union discourse in which the unemployment theme was central has had unclear outcomes. On one hand, to a certain extent one might attribute the positive development of Portuguese unemployment for the last 25 years to the unions' public pressure. However, it seems also reasonable to argue that politicians were more afraid of electoral consequences of unemployment than unions did, specially until the late 1980s due to the political instability of the democratisation process. On the other hand, and bearing in mind that politicians were aware of unemployment consequences, one might argue that unions should have used other themes in their discourse, in order to press for other labour conquests (specially if one takes into consideration that the majority of union' members were

employed). Nevertheless, it seems more reasonable to support the view that, to the trade unions confederations, it was more efficient to use unemployment concerns as a message than, for instance, calling a strike that requires 'solidarity' among their members and mobilisation capacity. Furthermore, one can argue that the unemployment 'message' targeted people's concerns and gave unions credibility to engage in a 'corporatist' Social Dialogue, whereas specific human resource management policies did not, for example. Ironically, one can conclude that the use of the unemployment theme was more directed to achieve political influence and respectability rather than aiming at any practical and concrete conquer at the workplace or company level.

Thus, in this context, one can conclude that unions had a common agenda with political parties as the unemployment topic reflects. Therefore, it can be argued that the reliance on common issues has proven to be an efficient strategy to maintain unions' influence in the Portuguese society.

b) Labour Market

In what regards the unions' political action one should stress that labour market conditions were related to the building of institutions at least under the period of the 'new democracy' (1974-90). In fact, the old tradition of heavy state intervention in regulating the employment contract and the industrial relations system during the dictatorship period combined with a political struggles period after the revolution, created benchmarks not only for labour standards but also for political action. For example, the CGTP's strikes - to avoid discussing employment contract clauses that could eventually lead to a flexibilization of the working time, was seen by analysts as a short-term struggle-oriented position. In fact, the flexibilization of working time could be seen as a setback in labours' conquests and jeopardise the institution. Nevertheless, according to analysts, the tactic to avoid discussing the issues at stake in employment contracts seems to be a dead-end tactic since the flexibilization of the labour market appears to be crucial to the economy. It can be said that the labour market conditions were related to the building of institutions in Portugal. They provided grounds to strengthen the actors like CGTP did engaging in political action to defend their interests. Nevertheless, one can argue that the outcomes were weak and not efficient since sooner or latter the labour market conditions will have to be flexibilized in accordance to the dictates of competition of the world economy or even the economic pressure of the EU enlargement.

c) Mobilization capacity

In Portugal the mobilization strategies were historically connected to the unions' political action. For example, during the dictatorship period, strikes were of political nature since they were outlawed. Hence, the legacy of Salazar's dictatorship had an important impact on the lack of reliance in formal membership and, thus, in the actual relative dependence on mobilization capacity. Furthermore, after the revolution, industrial conflict could also be of political or social nature. For example, to advocate free unionism or to pressure the government in terms of social standards (e.g. minimum wage). In the latter period, the strikes were also even ideological such as to protest and influence certain governmental policies. In fact, CGTP (at the time named Intersindical and still having the monopoly of labour representation) was the first movement to advocate agricultural expropriations or nationalisations of the economy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s - a period of free unionism that started in 1979 - there were some national strikes with varying success. An example of a successful industrial action with important impact was the 1988 national strike. In fact, the unions used political action to secure what may well be their major achievement in the 1980s: the maintenance of union rights such as the right to strike, and the protection of the main legal provisions on job security.

The effectiveness of mobilization capacity, however, decreased once political democracy was firmly established. After the early 90s, it was possible to observe a unions' shift towards some pragmatism instead of mobilization. In fact, the good economic performance combined with anti-union policy of the liberal-conservative PSD hindered the labour movement at the same time that provided it with a new paradigm: The Social Dialogue. Consequently, to a certain extent, one can observe a relative calm period. The Social Dialogue and the response that it required forced unions to review their positions in a broad range of topics as well as compromised them with those issues. Presently, one can argue that mobilization strategies became a less important strategy to maintain the labour movement strength. Yet, although CGTP's presence in the Social Dialogue forced the confederation to adopt a more pragmatic position, in political issues one can still observe a relatively important pressure to use mobilization capacity by the influential PCP hard-line unionists.

In this context, one can conclude that in the present 'corporatist' regime the mobilisation capacity has had fewer outcomes than the Social Dialogue. Furthermore, CGTP has not put the same effort in the Social Dialogue than it probably should, since its reliance on mobilization capacity has not proven to be as effective as the Social Dialogue had been. In

addition, UGT's reliance on its political influence¹² as well as its effective presence in the Social Dialogue has produced better outcomes and influence than its relatively weak mobilization capacity would.

d) Conclusions

The reliance of labour on the political action has been, overall, a way of strengthening the unions in society. It was an efficient way to influence the outcomes of the Social Dialogue and of the CB. In fact, both unions have been able to maintain a political pressure over the social partners, although through a different use of political action. As mentioned, the UGT relies on its founding strategy of political influence although perhaps more effectively, and CGTP continues to base a substantial part of its strategies on its rhetoric and mobilization capacity. Moreover, they apparently continue to have common agendas with the political powers on most topics such as unemployment, immigration, racism or child work.. However, one cannot state that the Portuguese society is in the presence of a new conceptualisation of the political dimension of unions since they still rely on the same founding ideologies and practical behaviours. Furthermore, the unions assumed only few of the regulatory functions previously attributed to the state. At the same time, the labour movement has also been losing ground at the workplace level, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

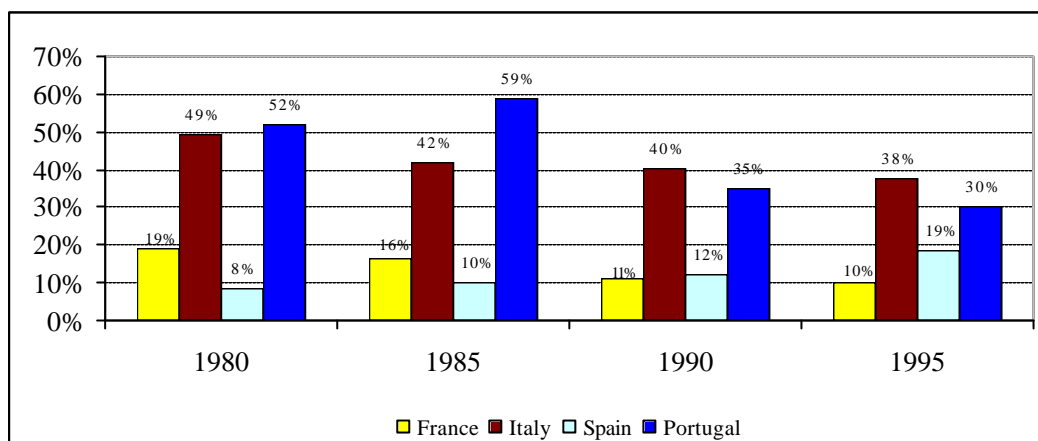
3.3.ORGANIZING THE NEW LABOUR FORCE

In parallel with the attempt to institutionalise the Social Dialogue and extend the CB as well as the emphasis in political action is the effort to increase the organizational basis of labour. The aim is to enlarge the volume of resources devoted to the recruitment and organization of new members, thereby enhancing the union's labour market power. This necessity has to be supplemented in the context of Europe and the declining Portuguese medium-low union density.

Although this work does not intend to be a comparative study, one can find some common features between the Portuguese and other Southern European unions. In fact, in terms of union density one can observe that the Portuguese unions experienced the same relative decline as the French and Italian but not the Spanish unions (Table 1).

¹² For example the present Portuguese Prime-minister was a UGT leader.

TABLE 1
Union Density¹³ in France, Italy, Spain¹⁴ and Portugal



Source: Adapted from Blaschke (2000) and Cerdeira (1997).

Until the early 1980s, the study of industrial relations was almost inexistent in Portugal. In fact, only non-academic literature had been published and only a small group of sociologists had analysed the labour movement mainly in major enterprises. It was not until the second half of the 1980s that a significant amount of academic work started to be published (see, among others, Mozzicafredo 1985; Stoleroff 1988b and Stoleroff 1988a). These limitations allied with a *laissez faire* attitude seemed to sustain a convenient *status quo* to all of the social partners. In fact, ‘a number of myths were spawned and maintained regarding the strength and presence of Portuguese unions’: for the employers and political parties it was convenient to have a ‘face’ to bargain with; for the unions it helped the myth of non-crisis in the labour movement to persist. In 1990, the Ministry of Labour eliminated from the National Company Survey (for companies with more than 100 employees) the question related to union membership, a fact that increased the difficulties in the study of the labour movement. There are, therefore, few quantitative references to assess the evolution of union strength, even now that the thesis of the labour movement crises is broadly accepted. One should stress, nevertheless, that sources on the Portuguese unions’ structure and membership are perhaps less problematic than in other Southern European countries such as Greece and Spain. (Naumann and Stoleroff 2000: 550-8).

¹³ Net density (employed union members as percentage of the labour force in dependent employment).

¹⁴ The 1980 value for Spain reports to the year 1981.

a) Union Density and Membership

There are now a total of 370 unions (compared to 328 in 1974), despite the numerous mergers among CGTP unions (Barreto and Naumann 1998). The CGTP¹⁵ confederation declares to include 145 unions¹⁶ (765,000 workers) while UGT claims to represent 80 directly affiliated organisations¹⁷ (400,000 workers). The independent unions represented¹⁸ about 12% of the labour force in 1991-95 (140,000 workers)¹⁹. Recent studies indicate that the union density is around 30% (Cerdeira 1997). The OECD data confirms that the union density in Portugal would be slightly below the European average (38%) and slightly above the OECD average (28%)²⁰.

b) Trends at workplace and company level

At the workplace level, some facts might explain the empirically documented²¹ decline of trade unions' strength: a) the macro-level negotiations are gaining centrality b) the elections for union representatives do not have a high level of electoral turnout (often with one single list²²), c) the works councils are almost inexistent²³ and d) the extremely low level of workers' involvement in the regulation of the work relations at the company level²⁴.

In a preliminary case study of three large companies concerning the unions' organization at workplace level, Stoleroff and Fonseca (2001) reported that the Portuguese unionists were mainly male, between 36 and 55 years old and had been full time workers for more than 15 years in their companies. They were also either semi-skilled or inter-middle workers with 4 to 15 years of education. In addition, most of them had taken unions' training courses and had belonged to the unions for more than 15 years, on average.

The study was conducted in three large companies with high union density (higher than 60%). In all these firms the major union was always affiliated to CGTP and always had more than 50% of the unionised workers. Yet, the latter facts did not reflect a high activity in the

¹⁵ CGTP (2001).

¹⁶ And 14 federations and 21 regional-unions (uniões).

¹⁷ Including two federations according to EIROOnline (May 00).

¹⁸ According to Cerdeira (1997).

¹⁹ In 1979-84 they only represent 4% of the labour force (63,000 workers).

²⁰ See Cerdeira (1997) and Dornelas (2000).

²¹ See Stoleroff and Fonseca (2001) and Cerdeira (2000).

²² See for an interesting discussion Stoleroff and Fonseca (2001).

²³ Based on interviews conducted in 2001, and Barreto and Naumann (1998: 416).

companies. In fact, unionists' activity was sporadic and contingent and was normally connected to contract negotiations. Nevertheless, they seemed to provide important functions to workers and were also a link with the management. However, at the workplace level the participation of unionists in informal negotiations was weak, reinforcing the idea of strong managerial prerogatives.

The study also sustained the idea that the union activity had been continually falling. Furthermore, it showed that shop-stewards or union leaders felt that they were more speakers for their peers than union representatives. It is relevant to notice that the activists affiliated to a CGTP union, maintained strong ideological views towards the labour movement and the communist ideal, even in a situation of union decline. Moreover, in the companies as well as in their sectors of activity, the industrial relations' situation was described to be 'calm' and the relationship with the capital 'good'. The study also concluded that the workplace bargaining happened mainly at the individual level, except for the wage bargaining in which the unionists still played a role. Besides, the majority of the activists felt that their union work was done either in a 'good' or in a 'medium' way, and that they felt respected, supported and encouraged by their peers.

Various empirical studies concluded that the unions have been losing links with their original grounds. In fact, according to Cerdeira (2000), in management issues such as investment, technological modernization and organizational changes, the trade unions have been losing presence and consequently bargaining power at firm and workplace level. A good example of this was the case of the privatisation of public enterprises. The unions, as well as the few existing works councils²⁵, were only able to include just a few basic labour demands in the privatisation process. The latter mainly consisted in assuring the basic labour contract rights instead of integrating any decision-making rights or gain more participation rights.

c) Elections and Recruitment

According to the activists mentioned in Stoleroff and Fonseca's study, the availability of union members to run for leadership or for shop-stewards had always been falling or was, at least, irregular. It can be concluded that the recruitment process seems to be generally blocked

²⁴ See Barreto and Naumann (1998).

²⁵ In Portugal the number of existing works councils is very low and are mainly concentrated in large private enterprises many of which were formerly public companies.

if one considers that: the unions have been continually losing members, there is low participation at the company level, and in the majority of the sectors usually the youngsters do not become unionised. The new HRM practices that have been introduced and the increasing managerial prerogatives further jeopardize the recruitment of new workers. In addition, the CB agreements often apply to all workers regardless of their membership, due to the regular adherence of minority unions and to the state's frequent legal extensions of the accords. The employees' right to be included in the best Collective Agreement also contributes to the workers' indifference towards the unions' work at the sectoral level of the CB. Therefore, instead of persuading the workers to join the unions, the legal framework encourages them to take a free-ride. This legal system could theoretically fertilise grounds for new membership, since most unions provide legal services to their members. In practice, however, it definitely does not contribute to capturing the 'new' labour force.

According to workers interviewed in a medium size industrial enterprise, the unions' service to their members is not sufficient. In fact, they complained that the local unionist only visits them once a year, on average. In the workers' opinion this service insufficiently protected them against managerial prerogatives and was not worth what they were paying. The unions' representatives only visited them to ask for their votes during the elections period. These findings support the documented declining trend of the activities at workplace and company levels. This decline can be attributed to the lack of new activists in unions' structures, which was indicated by the age of the unionists in the Stoleroff and Fonseca's case study as well as by the confederations' information. Other factors such as recent changes in the workforce composition or the fact that the pool of activists born after the revolution generally do not join unions, help to explain the present fall in the number of activists.

One can, therefore, argue that the lack of consistent union representation at the micro levels as well as the unions' deficient services constitute a significant and dangerous problem for the unions' future. Unlike their American counterparts²⁶, the Portuguese trade unions did not engage in a service model of unionism. Instead, they left their members with weak protection in their daily working life and normally only provide workers with legal advice and with representation at higher levels.

²⁶ See Hurd, *et al.* (2001)

d) Immigration

More and more, immigration is emerging as a major political issue in Portugal since the number of immigrants is increasing rapidly. Their origins have recently been shifting from the Portuguese speaking countries to the Eastern European countries. Due to the fact that they speak different languages the integration of these communities is not easy. Furthermore, although socially accepted, they are often more skilled than the Portuguese workers, a fact that might endanger national jobs. Although recent laws tried to legalise the majority of these new immigrants, the political spectrum is divided by different ideas to solve the immigration problem.

The common position of the unions seems to support the legalisation and integration of this new labour force. However, the unions are not likely to benefit from this stance since the workforce would only get one year working-visas and, therefore, would probably be working either temporarily or in part-time jobs. It is, thus, highly unlikely that they join the unions and participate in elections. Moreover, in Portugal the informal sector is still important in areas such as textile, tourism, construction and agriculture, in which it is difficult to persuade workers to unionise. However, the main unions have been sensitive to the immigrants' problems and have engaged in some political activity to defend their rights but they have been unable to go much further than symbolic support. Instead, other non-governmental organizations have been playing a more important role concerning this issue, such as Catholic organizations or other civil movements.

One should question the extent to which this issue would be relevant to the revitalization of the Portuguese labour movement. In fact, the immigration topic could be a double-edged sword. On one hand, this issue could conflict with national jobs, and immigrants are unlikely to become union members. On the other hand, however, the immigration 'flag' could give unions more relevance in the political arena. Taking into consideration that the unions' strategy has been towards the search for influence at higher levels, it can be concluded that the use of the immigration theme as a political 'flag' was more efficient than as a pragmatic 'capture' of this new labour force.

e) Conclusions

The mentioned declining trend at the workplace and company levels does not reflect a fall in the overall union strength. In fact, the influence of the Social Dialogue combined with a CB

process centralised at sectoral level (and a declining number of company CB agreements), supports the view that the overall balance is not negative. It might seem that the decline of strength at micro levels would have a negative impact on the trade unions' capabilities in society; however, effective meso and macro level strategies (such as the political use of immigration) have enabled them to maintain relative power in Portugal. In this context, one can conclude that, rather than enhancing rank-and-file strategies at the workplace and community levels, the unions' identity is becoming more focused on the 'institutional' issues that resulted from the Social Dialogue, CB or from political action.

3.4.COALITION BUILDING

The Portuguese coalition building process in the labour movement has to be seen under the light of continuous antagonism between CGTP and UGT. For example, until 1988 the competition and open hostility between the two major confederations hindered the effective joint action, not only in the CB process but also in negotiations with the government. However, the simultaneous call for a general strike in 1988 and the constant contacts in the Social Dialogue, led analysts to believe that reconciliation could be emerging. The reality is, nevertheless, the opposite. In fact, different strategies, structures and practices continue to prevent closer relations. In addition, the growth of negotiations with independent unions has increased the fragmentation of the bargaining process. According to Barreto and Naumann (1998), the co-operation in CB and industrial action still presents the exception.

There are still some examples of specific coalitions among the two major trade unions deriving essentially from the common financial difficulties they face. In fact, the state has discriminatory treatment regarding the financial support of the social partners' activities. According to UGT, unions should have the same supportive financial framework as the employers' associations, in order to help them to improve their participation and involvement in society. The state support available to employers helps them to strengthen their associations, to improve facilities and equipment, and to compensate for activities carried out within participatory structures in general and for services rendered in the course of CB in particular. Consequently, the unions have agreed to engage in a joint action in order to receive the same state support as the employers (EIROnline May 00).

Historically unions have been resistant to the green movement. As mentioned before, the PNE 2000, however, attempted to initiate a green discourse, which could reflect a change in the unions' strategy of coalitions. Yet, commentators believe that this might only be an

embryonic form of discourse that does not imply an intention of coalition-building with the Portuguese green movement. In other words, one should see this PNE 2000 'green policy' as a product of negotiations between state, employers and labour movement on some broad national policies rather than an evidence of ideological or strategic alliances.

In some cases, the Social Dialogue has involved the contribution of the civil society. For example, in order to provide poor families with a Guaranteed Minimum Income (a state subsidy), the unions, employers, government and civil associations became involved in a broad partnership. This platform for social partnership was seen by commentators as a successful story. However, due to the lack of studies it is not possible to analyse the extent to which the labour movement co-operates with the civil society.

The above-mentioned examples of labour movement coalitions are inconclusive. However, in specific cases the trade unions have engaged in temporary coalitions due to the common financial difficulties unions faced or to the Guaranteed Minimum Income. Unfortunately, the lack of studies does not allow a complete assessment of the extent to which the Portuguese labour movement is available and able to use coalition strategies to revitalise.

The Portuguese weak associative life has been amply documented. Although debatable, some authors explain this phenomenon with the heritage of Salazar's dictatorship. Others attribute it to the long decline in the status of politicians and, consequently, to their inability to change society. Another explanation might be the remnants of a short and failed romance with a Revolution that aspired to the communist dream of a more egalitarian society in the milieu of an eight-century-old feudal country. Whatever the reason might be, the Portuguese unions have relatively weak membership (around 30%) and do not have potentially strong allies in society. Hence, by avoiding coalitions with ideological rivals, the unions strive towards an institution-based model in their search for a stronger voice within the Portuguese society.

3.5.INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING AND MERGERS

During the past two decades the evolution of the unions' structure has been divergent. On one side, there has been an attempt to consolidate and rationalise the unions. CGTP, for instance, has been successful in its efforts to reorganise along both federal and regional lines and to integrate the smaller organizations into larger units. On the other side, the emergence of small new occupational unions has promoted the fragmentation of unionism – there are dynamic unions which are not integrated in the structures or are aside the mainstream labour

movement. A good example of these divergent trend can be found in the UGT's structure, in which one can observe an awkward combination of federal sector unions side-by-side with occupational unions (Barreto and Naumann 1998).

According to Barreto and Naumann (1998: 410), the UGT's strategy to create a new organizational structure based on a limited number of national industrial unions has made little progress. In fact, its unions have defended traditional demarcations and have resisted even the most obvious mergers in baking, insurance, services, transport, education, and fisheries. Besides the UGT's new national-based unions are all weaker than CGTP's²⁷ and, with white-collar groups and their unions resisting absorption into large sectoral organizations, they have been unable to achieve the federal integration of different workers' groups. In addition, other occupational and territorial divisions also persist, sometimes nurtured by rivalry between socialist and liberal-conservatives factions.

Presently, there are around 150 independent unions (mainly small and occupational). These unions are almost post-closed-shops that can be found among airline pilots, dockers, civil servants or train drivers. They usually operate in a highly cohesive and efficient way as labour market cartels or as lobbying groups. They reject any form of integration and aim only at defending their particular interests and at preserving their autonomy from any ideology or political influences. Furthermore, they reject the mainstream union's guiding principles such as egalitarian policies, narrow wage differentials and solidarity. The independent unions are regarded by the other sectoral unions as egoistic and egocentric cartels of privileged minorities, although UGT's views are more ambiguous since it relies on them in some sectors. (Barreto and Naumann 1998).

By the end of 1980s another fragmentation of the labour movement occurred. During the liberal-conservative government of prime-minister Cavaco Silva, the PSD labour organization – TSD – attempted to create a third confederation²⁸ by dividing UGT's service sector unions. However, the majority of PSD unionists refused the TSD's project and remained inside UGT. The third union, therefore, was limited to a small social base and, in 1995, it only had 7 small occupational and 5 sector unions with 'extremely low representativeness'. (Barreto and Naumann 1998: 411).

²⁷ For example in textiles and clothing, metal, chemicals, telecommunications and construction.

²⁸ Named Convention of Independent Unions.

The merging of similar unions of different confederations is rare. However, potential reasons for these mergers can be that their members often: have common goals in the same companies; face the same problems in their workplaces and enterprises; and want their unions to co-operate with each other, for instance, by reaching the same collective agreements at sectoral or company levels. Nevertheless, the firm control of CGTP's structures, the traditional demarcation of traditional unions in UGT, or even historical and ideological divergences impede most of the beneficial mergers. One can, thus, argue that possible mergers among unions of different confederations remain, for now, a difficult possibility.

To conclude, it is conceivable that internal restructuring and mergers could have had positive effects on the unions' movement. Nevertheless, considering its relative failure one should admit that it hardly contributed to revitalise the Portuguese labour movement.

- *An eye on the Future*

There are two main driving forces that could have impact on the possibility of further mergers between unions:

1. In the near future, unions are likely to deal with employers presenting a single 'face' at the Social Dialogue. This merger of the employers' confederations might be feasible for three main reasons: a) there have been consistent talks between CIP, CCP and CAP about a possible merger; b) the most influential elites of the regional employers' associations (AIP and AEP) finally merged into the main employers' confederation (CIP), thereby increasing the confederation's predominance among employers' representation; and c) analysts believe that the newly elected CIP leader will probably introduce changes in the merging strategy.

The merge of CIP, CCP and CAP could increase the employers' lobbying power. This mega-institution, therefore, would create synergies that might: a) reinforce its political nature; b) maintain a certain autonomy of its members for most of sectoral CB aspects of negotiation, and c) enhance the influence in UNICE (the main European employers' confederation). By presenting a united position from all Portuguese employers in Brussels, the new institution could augment its influence at European level.

2. The vicissitudes in the communist party might influence the class-struggle oriented CGTP, in the near future. On one hand, the PCP has been losing voters in legislative elections (in the Portuguese Parliament the PCP's representatives declined from 40 to 15 between 1976-99). This might have an impact on CGTP since the number of Communist voters is falling, and often the members of the unions and the confederation leaders have been associated with the PCP hard line. On the other hand, the possible renewal of the PCP ideology towards, for instance, the line of the Italian Communist Party, might pressure the class-oriented CGTP, since the Marxist-Leninist political hard-line still plays an influential role in CGTP's board. Yet, the renewal remains hypothetical since the hard-liners are the most active and continue to have a tight control over their structures. Therefore, at least in the near future, it is unlikely that this revitalization takes place.

As discussed, in a near future the trade unions are likely to face a single employers confederation. How can they respond to this possible united front? The obvious solution would be a merger between CGTP and UGT. It has been argued that the Social Dialogue enabled the confederations to agree on major topics. Furthermore, at sectoral level some unions (affiliated in different confederations) have been reaching some agreements and engaging in some common action. However, the unions' historical heritage as well as their structures, tactics, strategies and ideological differences remain as important factors impeding talks about potential mergers. Thus, on the short run it is unlikely that the confederations will fuse. Nevertheless, it is still plausible that a few sectoral, regional or even independent unions could restructure or merge within the same confederation.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper it was argued that, in the last decade, the ‘corporatist’ engagement undertaken by the trade unions had two major consequences: firstly, it maintained their strength; secondly, the workers lost much of the unions’ presence, at least at the workplace and firm level.

The unions have maintained their power and strength through the product of various different strategies. On one hand, it has been concluded that, the use of *Social Dialogue* was a powerful tool to revitalise unions’ influence whereas the *Collective Bargaining* process has not been a major instrument of the Portuguese labour movement, mainly due to its relative stagnation. Furthermore, although used differently, the *political action* weapon has been, overall, a way of strengthening the unions’ presence in society since it was able to pressure the social partners. On the other hand, it was also concluded that the *organizing the new labour force* strategy was not carried out with the same strong energy. In fact, it was observed that unions did not engage in significant rank-and-file strategies at the workplace, company and community level, a fact that could explain their declining trends at these levels. Furthermore, in specific cases, the trade unions have involved in temporary *coalition building* strategies. However, these activities cannot be considered significant. In addition, it is conceivable that the relative failure of *internal restructuring and mergers* may hardly have had any significant consequences to the labour movement.

In the analysis of the American labour movement, Hurd, *et al.* (2001) indicated that the unions’ revitalization was driven by two forces: *network mobilization* and *institutional support*. To the extent that these two studies can be compared, the Portuguese case indicates some divergence. For the last decade, there was apparently no strong network mobilisation led by the activists. Besides, the Portuguese unions appear to be more politically oriented to the top level. Furthermore, in the American case, ‘the *institutionalisation*, or the consolidation and deepening of ongoing relationships over time – in coalitions, politics, partnership, internal restructuring and international solidarity – was important in many cases for lasting reform efforts and strategic union success’ (Hurd, *et al.* 2001: 28). The findings of the present study point to the fact that, in Portugal, unions have engaged in a process of *institutionalisation*, but only in terms of partnership and politics. One might argue that, should the Portuguese unions have strongly engaged in coalitions, internal restructuring and probably more mergers, the

institutionalisation process could have been more successful. However, the product of the different strategies resulted in the maintenance of unions' strength in society. Nonetheless, one can argue that these achievements are unstable and, therefore, the paths undertaken may not have been sufficient to locate themselves strategically for the unknown future.

It was also observed that in general the Portuguese trade unions chose to be more political and ideologically driven, relying mainly on the same founding ideologies and practical behaviours rather than pursuing strong organising strategies, coalitions or mergers. At a first glance, one could be led to the conclusion that unions' choices were clever and articulated. However, it is also possible that, to a certain extent, the strategies followed were more a product of the times than their clearly defined strategies. If movements help to shape a certain society, it can also be argued that society can shape them. It is possible, therefore, to sustain the view that the new democracy and all its challenges were decisive to the strategies unions followed. Nevertheless, what seems to emerge from the present examination of the Portuguese labour movements is that unions' action is not simply determined externally but is also the outcome of internal discussion, debate and often conflict. Consequently, and taking in consideration that unions were almost inexistent as a free movement during the dictatorship, it can be sustained that they have done a surprising work. Hence, in the last decade, their responses to the challenges enhanced them to maintain their positions in society.

Summarizing, it can be postulated that the present trade union situation is a product of: a) the new role of unions at the political-institutional level, b) the insufficiency of credible alliances and internal restructuring and c) the fall of influence in union presence at workplace and company level. In this context, one can argue that the exchange between the workplace and firm presence, and the top and sectoral level influence has maintained the unions' strength in the Portuguese society. In other words, it might seem that the union decline at micro levels would have a negative impact on the trade unions' capabilities; however, macro and meso level strategies have enabled them to preserve a relative power.

It was also shown that the two main confederations still maintain some antagonism which hinders joint action and keep following distinct paths. In fact, although UGT relies on its founding strategy of political influence, CGTP continues to base a substantial part of its strategies on its rhetoric and mobilization capacity. Nevertheless, they apparently continue to have common agendas with the political institutions on various important issues. Maybe in the future, unions can find a common project against those who benefit from the labour's disarray.

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